Cultural Naturalization and the Church of the East in China:

Using Interreligious Iconography and Inscriptions to Investigate Identity in Yuan China

by

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Abstract

For well over a century, the Church of the East in China (also known as Nestorian Christianity or *Jingjiao*) has been commonly regarded as a syncretic sect of Christianity, possibly even adapting itself into oblivion. However, while the original basis for such an assessment is unclear, the actual evidence indicative of syncretism pales in comparison to the evidence that argues against it. For this reason, this essay makes use of the relative paucity of sources to lean into the question of what a better alternative, envisioned as cultural naturalization, could contribute. Cultural naturalization, as outlined in this paper, entails an analysis of interaction after initial contact between differing groups and posits a transition between contact and the final results of interaction. In effecting this, naturalization focuses on observing the evidence of how groups preserve or shed their identities as they negotiate the effects of contact.

In the context of *Jingjiao* in the port city of Quanzhou, China, applying the ideas of naturalization allows us to interpret the religious group in a transitory state of interaction. The evidentiary support for more exact and final results of interaction does not currently exist to make a substantiated assessment. However, as the essay constructs naturalization as an analytic tool for explaining the evidence of interaction, the concept lends itself well to circumventing this problem of evidence that limits the use of syncretism by treating interaction as a necessary process of groups in contact—either in the positive or negative or a mix of both. In doing so, the concept of cultural naturalization acts as a tool to examine the identity of the Church of the East in China—and other groups—through the evidence of their interaction.

Preface

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Eric Robert

Becklin.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction: "Degenerate Nominal Christianity" and the Problem of Syncretism

In 1888, Ernst Johann Eitel, a German missionary attached to the Basel Lutheran Mission in Hong Kong lambasted the Syriac Church of the East (*Jingjiao*[1] 景教 in Chinese). He offered quite a few choice words for how he viewed the Church's activity in China during the Tang period:

> [W]ithin two hundred years after the introduction of Christianity in Si-ngan Fu, with its hundreds of *quasi-Christian* monasteries, flourishing from A.D. 635 down to A.D. 845 in the neighbouring departments of North-China, the Christian faith professed in these monasteries had become thoroughly *emasculated*, deprived of the leading features of the gospel, *swamped* by Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist ideas, a *despicable* hybrid thing seeking but to eke out a miserable existence by koutouing to emperors and mandarindom in general and by propitiating the favour of the people through eclectic adoption of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist forms of worship, faith and speech. Where then is the value of the Si-ngan Fu tablet? Its historic value is very small as it simply tells us that a certain form of a *degenerate nominal* Christianity existed in China in a *miserable* monastic form from 635 to 781 A.D., and that is all [emphasis added].[2]

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[1] Hereafter, the essay additionally uses Church of the East and *Jingjiao* interchangeably to refer to the Syriac Church of the East in China from the Tang through the Yuan.

[2] Ernst Johann Eitel "Notices of New Books and Literary Intelligence" in *The China Review, or, Notes & Queries on the Far East* 16, no. 6 (1888): 385-6.

Eitel's judgment was part of his review of pioneering Scottish sinologist James Legge's

translation and analysis of "The Stele Commemorating the Dissemination of the Luminous

Teaching of *Da Qin* to the Central Realm", the earliest textual evidence for Christian activity in

China.[3] Another name often used is the "Nestorian Stele"; however, as much debate surrounds

the appropriateness of this term, the label of Nestorian has begun falling out of favor as a

misnomer.[4] Excavated in 1625 CE and brought to prominence by Jesuit missionaries who arrived

to observe it, the stele describes the Syriac Church of the East's entrance to China in the year 635

CE, the general history of the Christian sect going back to Genesis, and the activities of the

denomination in China leading up to the stele's composition in 781 CE. The stele contains

various terms that parallel Buddhist and Daoist traditional phraseology which provided the

source for Legge's criticism in his actual analysis.[5] However, Eitel's comments reflect his belief

that *Jingjiao* deliberately corrupted itself by adopting heretical teachings into its own (whether

this is actually the case or not remains to be seen and does not fall into the purview of this

project).[6]

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[3] More commonly known as the "Xi'an Stele"—named for the location of its discovery and the place it is currently housed at the Xi'an Stele Forest Museum in Shaanxi Province, People's Republic of China.
[4] See: Li Tang, *East Syriac Christianity in Mongol-Yuan China* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) for a detailed discussion of the problems of the term "Nestorian." Tang feels that "Nestorian" takes on a theological commitment that she does not see in *Jingjiao* Christianity, and thus prefers an alternative name. However, this is a relatively recent notion as she employs the term "Nestorian" in her earlier works. Tjalling Halbertsma is more clear on the taxonomical and theological issues of the term Nestorian in the history of the Church of the East in *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia: Discovery, Reconstruction and Appropriation* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3-5. He clarifies that the sect that moved eastward from Byzantium following Nestorius's excommunication grafted onto the existing congregations of the Church of the East when they arrived and would have represented a minority theological position. This provides the basis for discrediting the use of the term Nestorian to signify all Christian groups outside of the Byzantine Empire.
[5] James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-an Fu in Shen-si, China* (London: Trübner & Co., 1888), 54-55.
[6] Eitel, 385-6.

According to the stele, the Church of the East operated under imperial patronage in China from the year 635 until the year 845 CE when the Tang emperor Wuzong proscribed all foreign religions. While the proscription targeted Buddhism specifically, other foreign religions like Christianity and Manichaeism were also forced to disband. Following 845, the Church seemingly disappeared only to return again in force with the Mongol conquests of China. The Church experienced another period of relative freedom in China encountering difficulties just prior and following the ascension of the Ming dynasty in 1368.[7] The majority of *Jingjiao* Christians either fled with their Mongol supporters or disappeared into Chinese society, no longer retaining their discrete religious identity. Despite its turbulent demise in China, the Church of the East left behind a substantial number of tombstones that have slowly come to light over four centuries. One group of tombstones from the port city of Quanzhou in Fujian province does much to provide important clues to scholars wading in a scant body of evidence. Like the Xi'an stele, the tombstones possess a variety of different Christian images mixed with non-Christian images, leading to a similarly hybridized situation that Legge encountered with the text of the Xi'an stele in 1888.

Two things about this situation are interesting. First, for Eitel, the Church of the East willingly sacrificed its religious integrity to mingle with less worthy religious groups.[8] Second, in an interesting twist, Eitel's comments have often been attributed to James Legge.[9] Somewhere

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[7] Bizhen Xie and Bin Xu "The Rise and Fall of Nestorianism in Quanzhou during the Yuan Dynasty" in *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, Li Tang and Dietmar Winkler, eds. (Zürich: LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2013), 274-6. Another possibility that the two authors posit is that the foreign communities in Quanzhou suffered at the hands of xenophobic riots and massacres in the latter years of the Yuan.

[8] Eitel, 386.

[9] Citations attributing the quotation to Legge can be found in John Foster's work *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), in Samuel Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500*

shortly thereafter, the Church of the East in China acquired a syncretic identity in the eyes of later scholars.[10] Being already well-known for his work with classical Chinese texts, Legge's translation work and comments have been staples for the study of *Jingjiao* as the jumping-off point for English-language study of the Church of the East in China and it is likely here that Eitel's comments were misconstrued as Legge's. This mis-association of Eitel's comments combined with Legge's prominence has given the German missionary's acid condemnation a deep seat from which to pull the history of *Jingjiao*. Regardless of its accuracy, the Church's reputation for syncretism in this way became connected to Legge's (and transitively, Eitel's) assessment as it touched off the powder of *Jingjiao*'s historiography. Because of this connection, syncretism has persisted as the dominant narrative of adaptation for the Church of the East.

This essay is an exercise in reexamining the long-lasting connection of syncretism as an analytical category and the Syriac Church of the East in China. In doing so, it offers a new way to examine religious interaction in China[11] and other settings. By interrogating the possible shortcomings of how to view contact between different groups, this paper employs the Church of the East and its relationship to the question of syncretism as a case study for setting up a new

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(San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), and in Ralph Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: a History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986). Norman J. Girardot's biographical tome on James Legge: *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) has the correct citation, naming Eichert as the author.

[10] See: John Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1939) for what appears to be the earliest use of the term 'syncretism' in relation to the Church of the East, and Clovell, 1986. Foster's writing (mistakenly) credits Legge for putting the character of the Church of the East in a negative light and for how it became connected with the label of syncretism. Foster seeks to counter Legge's alleged claim to syncretism in general. Though, given the prevalence of the topic as it continues in the popular mindset, he was likely unsuccessful.

[11] Throughout this paper, and for the sake of convenience, the term 'China' will refer exclusively to the geographic region approximating the current boundaries physically controlled by the People's Republic of China. Most of the locales discussed here correspond to historical settings within these boundaries, but I will also be as specific as possible to avoid confusion.

structure to view contact and the phenomena resulting from it. This structure employs a new concept—cultural naturalization—that focuses on evidence of identity to illustrate the complex path from contact to possible adaptation. Through such an illustration this exercise advocates for more methodical consideration of different categories of analysis when looking at interactions between groups.

Peter Yoshiro Saeki, a Japanese religious historian, was the first to complete a translation of the Xi'an stele in conjunction with other recently discovered *Jingjiao* scriptures in English. Though preceded by James Legge—and following Eitel's example in critiquing the Church as heretical per his own devout faith—Saeki broke ground in tracing the etymology of religious parallel terms found in all sources he translated. He built on the existing work of Legge by including translations of the *Jingjiao* documents taken from Dunhuang by French Sinologist Paul Pelliot in combination with the Xi'an stele. In the second edition of these translations, Saeki endeavors to identify and explain possible borrowing of Chinese religious and philosophical terminology: something he—like Eitel—characterizes in a negative light.[12] In agreeing with

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[12] Peter Yoshiro Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* 2nd ed. (Tokyo: Toho Bunkwa Gakuin, 1951), 50-51 and 448-450. Saeki's effort to explain these origins is a symptom of his translation work and his assessments follow each document's translation into English. He predominantly focuses his analytical efforts on Christian scriptural content found on the stele as well as Syriac etymologies of the Chinese translations from the original Syriac, even though he does not provide copies of the original Chinese manuscripts. One large interpretation Saeki makes of the Xi'an stele's text comes out of an association he makes between the language of "Confucian morality" compared with the language of the "Mosaic code" prescribing moral behavior in the Hebrew Bible. This inference thus connects the terminology of the stele by Christians of the Church of the East to an attempt at linguistic cultural accommodation. Though other examples of this exist later in Saeki's translation and analysis of the Dunhuang documents, it is important to remember that these inferences are based in text only. Despite the circumstantial nature of these claims by Saeki, they prove significant as first attempts to identify the interreligious parallels in the manuscripts' terminology and to draw conclusions from them. However, his conclusions improve as his parallels become more strongly connected. One example of this comes from his translation of "The Lord of the Universe's Discourse on Alms-Giving." Saeki makes a connection between the Buddhist term *shizun* (世尊), that he attributes to Avalokitesvara, and its use in the text as connection to the Christian godhead. While still an exciting connection, the term *shizun* more probably refers to Sakyamuni (based on present Chinese usage) over

Eitel's analysis, Saeki reinforced the connection between the Church of the East and syncretism as the dominant explanation of the mixtures found in the *Jingjiao* imagery.

The two main issues with Eitel and Saeki's perspectives and scholars' subsequent use of syncretism to identify the characteristics of the Church of the East rest in the parameters of the term syncretism itself. The basis by which Eitel and following scholars arrived at their conclusions during the early study of *Jingjiao* differs from how scholars approach the topic at present, including developing definitions of syncretism. Eitel's (and in some ways Legge's) own views of the Church of the East can be attributed to common attitudes of his time and place, just as those I express here are products of this time and place (and in reaction to those of the past). This necessitates the reexamination that I have proposed to include these issues of historiographical development and difficulty in separating the study of *Jingjiao* from the automatic temptation to employ one category of analysis when another may illuminate the Church's interactions more clearly. The two scholars' assessments also impute a level of intentionality to the modifications they are observing in the Church's texts.

First, Eitel's own condemnation and ensuing historians' subsequent use of syncretism (while using Legge's name) implies an understanding of a syncretic entity's intentionality—that they knowingly compromised Christian theological integrity for the sake of fitting in.[13] However, as will be noted below, such intentionality does not explicitly exist in definitions contemporaneous with early twentieth century studies. Current study of the Church of the East in

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Avalokitesvara. Whether its contemporary usage at the time meant to indicate Avalokitesvara, Saeki does not say. However, regardless of *shizun's* definition as referring to the Buddha or to a boddhisattva with a Christ-like mission of mercy and compassion, the term retains a Buddhist orientation over other terms found in Chinese philosophy, making it a significant indicator of possible cultural adaptation (Saeki 78-112, 153).

[13] Eitel, 385-386.

China lacks this same interpretation because its source-base cannot confirm any claim of conscious action on the part of its members. Therefore using syncretism as a way to construct a means of explanation for the phenomena observed in the extant *Jingjiao* sources does not work well at present to substantively study the Christian group. This does not disqualify it from ever serving as a means to characterize *Jingjiao*. I argue instead that we should table it for consideration and instead pursue other means to analyze the evidence of the Church's interaction with other religious groups.

The issue of intentionality is problematic for the connection of syncretism to Eitel and Saeki's claims of the group's cognizance of the parallels from outside the group because it deviates from a commonly held definition of the time. Intentionality connotes—most importantly for the definition I am constructing here—a *deliberate* act with the group's members cognizant of the adaptations they are making. While mentioned earlier in critique of Eitel's assessments, this quality of this purposefulness is one that cannot be found in early definitions of syncretism. For example, the definition found in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, being coined at the turn of the twentieth century, implies that syncretism is "generally" unconscious.[14] Like Eitel, Saeki's analysis (later characterized as a commentary on syncretism by following scholars[15]) imparts such agency on the part of the Church of the East's members as the definition I have presented allows. Thus, while the *Encyclopaedia*'s definition allows for syncretism to be an unconscious process, Eitel and Saeki's claims of the Church's degeneration to its own members'

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[14] James Hastings, John A Selbie, and Louis H. Gray, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* vol. 12 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1908-1926), 156.

[15] In addition to my previous examples of a syncretic Church of the East in an above note is Moffett's discussion of syncretism and the Church of the East in relation to Legge and Saeki's assessments. See: Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 309-314.

behavior link them to scholars' later interpretation of syncretism and the Church of the East. This linkage in turn necessitates my own updated definition of syncretism and my following re-evaluation of how to view the ways in which religious interactions can be examined with respect to *Jingjiao*.[16] So in spite of this discrepancy between early definitions of religious syncretism and the way Eitel and Saeki characterized their observations, the connection between them still exists and has informed later analyses of *Jingjiao*.

Second, while Eitel's own prejudice can be easily explained, scholars coming after him and James Legge must deal with the translator's assessments (and the missionary's review) because they cleave to *Jingjiao*'s identity so strongly on the basis of Legge's prominence in the early translation field and the effect of scholars' mis-association of Eitel's comments to him. While some have directly called syncretism's usefulness for characterizing *Jingjiao* into question,[17] common perception of the Church of the East's alleged syncretism remains quite high outside of the specialized *Jingjiao* historiography.[18] This is problematic because, as will be

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[16] Saeki, 448-449.

[17] See: Li Tang, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese: together with a new English Translation of the Dunhuang Nestorian Documents (*Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002) and John Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939) for particularly strong examples of direct attempts to dismantle syncretism's applicability in studying the cultural identity of the Church of the East in China.

[18] The concept of syncretism as applied to the Church of the East appears in several recent and semi-recent works. For example, see David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea (*Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) and the self-published work by church historian Dale A. Johnson, *Syncretism: Creativity and Consciousness in the Tang Dynasty* (Tennessee: 2011). While Chung's work originated in the mid-twentieth century, his book's publication in 2001 by an academic press speaks enough to syncretism's persistence in common perception of the Church of the East. Johnson's book likely enjoys significantly less prestige than Chung's though it nonetheless also signifies the persistence of syncretism as a valid characterization of the Church of the East's cultural identity. Finally, another example of the idea's resilience can be found in well-known test preparation material company Kaplan's review guide for North American high schoolers' Advanced Placement World History exams: Jennifer Laden and Patrick Whelan, *AP World History 2015* (New York: Kaplan Publishing, 2014). The text does not directly connect the Church of the East and syncretism as do the above two examples. However, syncretism and the Church of the East are mentioned in the same breath when discussion Christian mission practices presenting

indicated below, the present definition of syncretism likely presents far more variety than when Eitel made his original assessment that started the chain-reaction of mis-association to labelling *Jingjiao* as syncretic. Such variety makes the cavalier use of syncretism quite inappropriate without seriously considering the range of other possible applications. Also, as Legge, Eitel, and Saeki relied only on a handful of texts when providing the assessment of *Jingjiao* that led to its labelling as syncretic, claims to it cannot be reasonably substantiated without further evidence revealing intentionality towards syncretism. Such claims thus may unduly erase part of *Jingjiao*'s religious and cultural identity by neglecting to entertain other analytic possibilities.

Looking at syncretism from a Chinese perspective, then, Timothy Brook's essay, "Rethinking Syncretism: the Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China" lays out an excellent discussion of the value of restrictive definitions of syncretism to prevent its casual use to define any and all religious interactions found throughout Chinese history.[19] It is easy to suspect the same broad definition that Brook alludes to in his essay at play in the continued perception of syncretism following Legge, Eitel, and Saeki's writings.[20] Such an early definition as Brook mentions in critique leaves as much room for interpretation on the nature of syncretism as it leaves to include any and all forms of religious interaction.

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a short leap to such a direct connection that Chung and Johnson tout in their works. Even though the third example presented here does not reflect academic scholarship, it illustrates the degree to which syncretism as a label for the Church of the East has permeated public conception of the term. Finally, all three of these works employ the outmoded term "Nestorian" when referring to the Church of the East, reflecting their lack of currency in the appropriate label for the Church of the East. Lastly, Martin Palmer's controversial claims about Christianity and Daoism's relationship in extant Tang Dynasty Christian texts equates to the same level of syncretism that the previous authors employ. See: Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Wellspring/Ballantine, 2001).

[19] Timothy Brook. "Rethinking Syncretism: the Unity of the Three Teachings and Their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China" *The Journal of Chinese Religions* 21 (1993), 14.

[20] Brook, 13 n1.

In addition to Brook's essay, Judith A. Berling has also worked toward a better definition of syncretism than simply the merging of two or more religious traditions that Brook critiques in his article. In a chapter of her book *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, Berling elegantly attempts to rehabilitate the term syncretism from common critiques of the practice being "perfidious, random, corrupting, or superficial."[21] To do this she constructs a new definition of syncretism as "the borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation."[22] While a much more sophisticated definition of syncretism than the definitions she works to refute, Berling's definition remains extremely broad, which is exactly the concern that Brook cautions against in his essay critiquing syncretism's application. That is to say, in the Chinese context, virtually any religious interaction found in Chinese history has the potential to fall under one or more parts of Berling's definition.[23] Relying on syncretism as a singular, default category for all of these different settings of religious interaction does not provide enough analytical power or diversity to handle all types of cultural interaction in China let alone in other areas. This necessitates a different approach to categorizing religious interactions.

Berling herself acknowledges her definition's broad scope, advocating its usefulness in the analysis of her topic at the time—one man's efforts to create an amalgamated Chinese

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[21] Judith A. Berling. *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

[22] Berling, 9.

[23] For example, Erik Zürcher's discussions of Buddhism becoming nativized to China in *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), the Rites Controversy of the Jesuit mission in China in David Mungello *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994), and even the politically privileged Christian mission projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries discussed in Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) all show some signs of adapting to Chinese religious and cultural norms and fall under Berling's example. Additionally, only Zürcher, writing before Berling established her definition, explicitly employs syncretism in his analysis. However, whether or not all of these examples ought to be considered syncretism simply on the basis of Berling's remains doubtful to me due to the definition's broad scope.

religious sect. She even acknowledges a future "need of further clarification and narrowing" as

analysis of syncretism develops.[24] Her definition particularly requires narrowing in its emphasis

on reconciliation with the "home tradition."[25] This explication, then, implies a shift in identity as

it connotes that engaging in syncretic behavior draws a religious group away from orthodoxy—

an action that requires rationalization of the now-amalgamated religious identity. Moreover, the

term reconciliation implies that syncretic behavior involves a mixing of two incompatible belief

systems. This shows how potentially hazardous syncretism is to apply as an analytical term as

the issue remains, in the end, with the breadth of the term's scope (even in Berling's

conceptualization). As this definition of the term continues to allow for broad inclusion of

virtually any religious interaction in China, it encourages ignorance of other, potentially more

appropriate analytical terms to describe religious interactions.

More importantly, still, Berling's definition also implies the intentional coordination of a

religious group to graft these outside elements to its own. However, just like Saeki's assessment,

this encounters the difficulty of intentionality, something that syncretism as an analytical

category to explain religious interaction cannot dispose of without losing its primary meaning in

the context of *Jingjiao*. Such a crucially specific ingredient of the traditionally broad term

additionally requires adequate evidence to apply it. Where the *Jingjiao* body of evidence lacks

any indication of syncretic intentionality, Berling's definition requires this knowledge in order to

be viable. This is the same problem with Saeki's condemnation of syncretic behavior: adequate

evidence currently has not surfaced to reflect intention to amalgamate *Jingjiao*'s Christian beliefs

with various Chinese traditions. Moreover, both Saeki's assessment and Berling's revitalized—

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[24] Berling, 13.
[25] Berling, 11-12.

though broad—definition connote a conscious shift in identity that the *Jingjiao* materials do not support.

There are other categorizations as well that may also be used to discuss other interactions between religious groups in Chinese history. Accommodation, acculturation, vernacularization, and Sinification (among many others) are all possible ways to shed light on the Church of the East in China. However, each approach encounters difficulties in direct application because of the unique situation presented by the *Jingjiao* body of evidence and their own logistical issues as categories of analysis.

Accommodation and acculturation are two of the most common terms that describe the adaptation of migrant religions into areas of Chinese cultural influence. Describing one group taking on certain aspects of a neighboring group and modifying them for self-interested purposes, they are most useful when we are able to understand the direction of adaptation clearly because the words are semantically difficult in this regard. As they could connote adaptation in either direction, simply reading them on the page provides few clues to which party is adapting to whom.[26] Where accommodation has been used—such as the history of Jesuits in the Ming and Qing—the direction of adaptation is clear due to our knowledge of Jesuit missionaries' designs in adapting to their local surroundings. The term, however, remains a favorite among historians

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[26] John W. Berry has developed a model for acculturation that specifies different types of acculturative adaptation resulting from intercultural contact. However, his views on this are most often focused on these adaptive processes producing results out of conflict and that only a few limited varieties of acculturation are the only possible outcomes of intercultural contact. Moreover, the criteria he provides for assessing which variety is most suitable are difficult to apply in a historical setting and the parameters for each are very broad. In the case of the Church of the East, almost none of the evidence can directly correlate to affirm one or more of the three criteria ('retention of cultural identity', 'positive relationship to dominant society', and 'group right to choose options.' Such a model clearly orients toward contemporary or recent past analysis rather than toward an analysis of historical groups (John W. Berry, "Acculturation as Adaptation" in *Acculturation: Theory, Models, and Some New Findings*, Amado M. Padilla, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 9-25).

of the Jesuits, though it ranges from labeling the Jesuit project as purely an effort to mission to

the Chinese[27], to claiming the effort of acculturation sprung out of an effort to win converts

among the educated elite[28], and to overruling the agency of the Jesuits in choosing to incorporate

Chinese culture into their mission. This third approach instead identifies this adaptation as a

reaction to the Chinese cultural climate, creating an imperative to adapt. Simply put, in the Jesuit

historiography, the impetus for accommodation shifts depending on which of these perspectives

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[27] German historian Johannes Bettray surmised that the Jesuits' efforts to appropriate some elements of Chinese culture to improve the efficacy of their mission in general, something he calls the *akkommodationsmethode* or, accommodation method. Bettray concerned himself with analyzing the missiological methodology of the Jesuits in China. In his book, he does this by breaking down the mission into various aspects to show how the Jesuits changed their behavior to gain converts. These aspects include accommodation of appearance, accommodation of language, accommodation of arts, accommodation of knowledge and learning, and religious accommodation. He uses all of these points to illustrate how the Jesuits undertook this type of acculturation to Chinese beliefs and habits in order to gain missiological traction. See: Johannes Bettray, *Die Akkommodationsmethode des P. Matteo Ricci S.I. In China* (Rome: Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1955), 384-5. Despite the similarities to be seen between Bettray and later historians, he attends almost exclusively to Jesuit agency in devising the *akkommodationsmethode* through the missionaries' study of their area targeted for conversion (Bettray, 255). This attention keeps him focused solely on the efforts of the missionaries to spread the Gospel and does not distinguish factors of influence beyond the Jesuit community.

[28] Jesuit historian David Mungello argues that Matteo Ricci's "accommodation method combined…the Confucian tradition with a tactical approach for introducing Christianity into China." See: David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Franz-Steiner-Verlag-Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985), 57. Moreover, he asserts that Ricci attempted to employ a "Confucian-Christian" synthesis that conflicted with the Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist syncretism that Mungello asserts was typical of the late-Ming period (Mungello, 62). While this does not necessarily indicate that such a "Confucian-Christian" synthesis specifically targets the educated, Mungello's connects this attempt to acculturate to Confucian philosophy with the knowledge of Jesuit familiarity with Confucian texts. What's more, Mungello cites Ricci's attention to converting the intelligentsia by viewing his commentary on the complementarity of the Confucian and Christian teachings as directed at confronting criticisms of Christianity that the Confucian elite may have raised against the missionaries. Finally, Mungello states that "Ricci counted on the commanding role of the literati as model-builders in Chinese society to bring along the less-educated masses" (Mungello, 64). Again, this assessment shows Mungello's commitment to the notion of the Jesuit mission pinning its success on winning the acceptance of the scholar elites and that the Europeans deliberately pursued cultural accommodation to achieve this. Liam Brockey employs a bit more nuance when he briefly treats Jesuit cultural accommodation in his larger book *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission in China*. Brockey first shows that the Jesuits attempted to convert "educated Chinese" by exposing them to European sciences as a gateway to developing an interest in Christianity. See: Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 46. While careful not to forget the entire focus of the mission to gain converts, Brockey views the focus on incorporating Confucian philosophy with Christian doctrine as a vital part of the Jesuit missiological approach.

one adopts. Further, we also can see that these same men who chose to adapt to certain local customs also expected to graft some of their own observances into those same practices and beliefs.[29] That, unfortunately, does not hold in the same way when considering the Church of the East. Lacking the evidence possessed in the Jesuit historiography, indiscriminately claiming a trajectory of adaptation for *Jingjiao* would prove risky and (similar to the current case surrounding syncretism) difficult to amend if incorrect.

Vernacularization presents another opportunity for categorizing the adaptations that appear in the *Jingjiao* religious community. As it mostly refers to adaptations in terminology toward local usage, the term could apply in limited ways to those areas of the Church of the East's body of evidence that display this—most notably through the use of Chinese language. Unfortunately, however, the term also implies intentionality and that those who activated the process that the term describes were in control of the adaptive process. Thus, its utility in characterizing the adaptations of the Church of the East falls into the same difficulty as already described with syncretism.

The final term to consider, Sinification—or Sinicization—indicates the process of adopting characteristics of the dominant 'Chinese' culture, and while this may also be just as applicable as a category as the previously mentioned ones, it currently remains unideal for analysis because of the evidences that indicate a preservation of group identity among the *Jingjiao* Christians.[30] The metrics commonly used to analyze the extent of

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[29] See: Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals in the Cultural Exchange between China and Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) for a treatment of the instance just described.
[30] For further discussion of the different ways Sinification/Sinicization can be used, see Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 151-162 and Eber, "Kai-feng Jews Revisited: Sinification as Affirmation of Identity" in *Monumenta Serica* vol. 41, 1993, 231.

Sinification/Sinicization cannot be met by the available Christian evidence.[31] If the Church's artifacts show aspects of its imported identity preserved, then the application of Sinification as a category for analysis becomes much more difficult. Having exhausted virtually all previous categories used to study religious and cultural interactions throughout Chinese history, an approach that keeps the limitations of *Jingjiao*'s evidence in mind needs to be constructed and accounted for in the analytical toolbox of studying cultural interactions.

With the difficulties of the above concepts in mind, what I am about to propose does not entail a simple terminological shift to provide greater clarity. Rather, the following ideas— spurred by the difficulty of approaching the Church of the East—will expand the process of how to analyze the presence of one group in a milieu other than the one from which it originated with the interest of avoiding the evidentiary pitfalls displayed in Legge, Eitel, and Saeki's respective analyses. The restructuring of how we view interactions between an immigrating group and the local through the introduction of what I call "cultural naturalization" serves as not only a new, stand-alone category of analysis for these interactions, but also as a prism through which we as observers should pass our constructed categories of analysis (e.g. syncretism, accommodation etc.).

So while syncretism and other terms remain too narrow or require too many specific criteria for analyzing the Church of the East in China through its limited scope of evidence, they remain unusable until such time as more evidence can be uncovered. We need, therefore, to find a way to reexamine the apparent interactions found in the evidence of the Church of the East in

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[31] See Marc Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses: Constructing Ethnicity in Tang China (618-907)" PhD diss., Princeton University, 2001, 62.

China. One way to do this is to adopt a theory that takes on a universal approach: Erik Zürcher's "cultural imperative."

In his article "Jesuit Accommodation and the Cultural Imperative," Zürcher believes that a better understanding of Jesuit cultural accommodation can be found by studying the Chinese cultural influence that he believes directed the interaction of two groups. He begins by making an original distinction that "'[a]ccommodation' was not only practised by the Jesuit fathers, but also by the converted literati themselves….To them conversion meant that a new dimension was added to their Confucian faith…."[32] Thus, Zürcher argues the Christian Confucian elite also possessed agency in manipulating the extent of incorporation of Confucian ideals into the Christian message of the Jesuits. Moreover, Zürcher touches on the importance of orthodoxy (*zheng* 正) for Confucian elites, making it so that "no marginal religion penetrating from the outside could expect to take root in China" without conforming to the pattern established by the complementarity of Buddhism and Confucianism.[33] This complementarity is key, and Zürcher clearly demonstrates that it exists in the commentary by the Christian scholar official of the Ming, Yang Tingyun, who expresses the congruity of Confucian and Christian teachings.[34] For Zürcher, then, the choice to adapt foreign religious teachings to Confucian culture was hardly a choice at all, but an experience that all foreign religions underwent in order to conduct successful missions in China.[35]

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[32] Erik Zürcher. "Jesuit Accommodation and the Cultural Imperative" in *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* David Mungello, ed. (Nettetal, Steyler Verlag, 1994), 32.
[33] Zürcher, 41.
[34] Zürcher, 45.
[35] Zürcher, 42 and 62.

Zürcher's theory attempts to satisfy all criteria for the interaction between differing cultural groups and does well in applying to all "marginal" religions.[36] However, his theory is very broad and gives little analytical power to religions beyond the acknowledgement of such a phenomenon's existence. It can be used to inform the trajectory of interaction following contact between groups and work toward more accurately employing specific analyses like accommodation, acculturation, and syncretism, and in this respect is extremely important for informing our views on cultural interactions in Chinese history. The theory, though, leaves much inaccessible to us after explaining the causative factors behind religious adaptations in China.

The problem for the Church of the East remains, then, the problem of how to approach its evidence of interaction that can more closely examine the social worlds experienced by the Christians of the Church of the East during the Yuan dynasty. This essay proposes to restructure these current broad and specific approaches for getting closer to the cultural interactions and social worlds of Quanzhou by creating a new paradigm called "cultural naturalization", a concept that widens the realm of observable interactions that have thus far been created to analyze religious interactions. It then employs the paradigm as an intermediate analytical category between the cultural imperative—that is the basis informing initial contact between groups—and more specific modes of analysis like syncretism and accommodation. Finally, by engaging with evidence currently available from the Yuan period, we can use Church of the East in China as a case study to characterize the group's identity along the lines of naturalization and position it out of the limited purview of syncretism. This case study can thus help reconfigure our

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[36] Zürcher, 42.

understanding of social and cultural interactions in medieval China by restructuring the entire

process by which we view and characterize such interactions.

"Translation Difficulties": Characteristics of the *Jingjiao* Historiographical Field

Before continuing with the development of cultural naturalization, it is important to note that the material evidence of the Church of the East in China remains one of the strongest areas to study *Jingjiao*. This is due to the high number of extant objects, making it difficult to divorce the importance of material culture from the study of text-based *Jingjiao* sources.[37] Such a connection makes the study of *Jingjiao*'s material culture an integral piece of its historiography. This is important to consider going forward because unlike those researching the Jesuit mission in this analysis (with the exception of Zürcher), many researchers of *Jingjiao* treat text-based and material sources as equally necessary to their analysis.

The *Jingjiao* historiography is not as prominent, nor as far-reaching as the Jesuit historiography. Namely, scholars of Jesuit history enjoy a significantly larger body of text-based primary sources from which to extrapolate intentionality of accommodation on the part of the Jesuit missionaries or their local counterparts. Additionally, many of these sources have Jesuit authors, making the resulting historiography better connected to the Jesuit mission by way of their direct testimony. Lack of such comparatively comprehensive text-based sources presently complicates the study of *Jingjiao* and limits scholars' ability to match the level of analysis that the Jesuit historiography enjoys. This limitation is largely due to the relative anonymity of *Jingjiao* Christians in the extant source material which subsequently negatively impacts scholars' ability to interpret these Christians' intentions as readily as historians of the Jesuits might.

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[37] The catalogue found in the compilation by Samuel N.C. Lieu, et. al. *Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Quanzhou (Zayton)* Turnhout: Brepols, 2012 provides a good illustration of the number of Christian and Manichaean objects in the city of Quanzhou alone.

Contrasting with the proportionally bountiful Jesuit historiography, how scholars approach *Jingjiao*'s religious interactions in China when *not* relying on or confronting syncretism falls into two categories: epigraphic and iconographic materials. The first category comprises epigraphic and manuscript sources. The scholars who study these usually focus on defining the identity of the Church of the East in China; however, an analysis of cultural accommodation typically follows this effort. For example, in their respective translation projects, Peter Yoshiro Saeki and Tang Li both delve into the scriptures and inscriptions of early *Jingjiao* and in their effort to determine more about the Church through text-based research, simultaneously analyze how these texts and inscriptions used Chinese concepts to better illustrate their mission. Tang, however, differs from Saeki in her direct confrontation of syncretism as a viable lens through which to view the Church of the East.

Tang cautions against the readiness to attribute *Jingjiao*'s textual borrowing of Chinese classical terminology as syncretism. She attempts to qualify this in two ways. First, she treats the Church's use of the word *fo* (佛) to indicate God and which she subsequently attributes to syncretism on the basis that the two terms are incompatible.[38] Second, she uses the various appearances of Classical Chinese terminology on the Xi'an stele to challenge the temptation of using syncretism as a reflex to analyze the Church's cultural borrowing:

> In the Nestorian Inscription alone, there are phrases from many Chinese classics: thirty places from *Yijing* (*Book of Changes* 《易经》), thirty from *Shijing* (Book of Odes 《诗经》), twenty from *Chunqiu* （*Annals Spring and Autumn* (sic) 《春秋》), and some passages in connection with other Chinese historical books. There are also many Buddhist or Taoist colored words due to translation difficulties.... They are quotations and adopting (sic) of some famous Chinese

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[38] Tang, 141. Additionally, it goes without saying that *fo*/佛 commonly refers to the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and Buddhism.

classical works, which show that the author had a good knowledge of Chinese culture and it would be unfair if it is condemned as syncretism.[39]

As stated earlier, Tang's critical approach to the extent of syncretism on the part of the Church of the East helps inform current inquiries into the nature of the *Jingjiao* mission and helps push away from syncretism as a knee-jerk assessment and towards an alternative assessment in cultural naturalization. However, this critique of syncretism in this instance does not solve the greater problem of which the term itself is symptomatic. In order to prevent this same misapplication from repeating, scholars need to restructure *how* to approach contact between cultures.

Because iconographic analysis of the Church of the East has only recently begun, the historiographical body of work pertaining to the cultural accommodation of *Jingjiao* is still quite small. However, as the general *Jingjiao* imagery typically displays an obviously mixed heritage of iconography (Islamic styling, Buddhist lotuses, jewels, and apsaras, and obviously the crucifix, for example), virtually the entire corpus by Kenneth Parry and Yan Xiaojing,[40] though small, pertains to this blending—not syncretism—of different iconographic groups and provides further weight for the formation of cultural naturalization as a new conceptual framework with

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[39] Tang, 141.

[40] In a small article, Yan Xiaojing, a sculpture artist, discusses some pieces of cultural conjunction found in the art of the Church of the East. She explicitly seeks to analyze areas of incorporation of non-Christian religious styles. Even though most of her article makes guesses at the possible background surrounding how assimilation of different religious images happened among the Christians, the questions she asks help to open the field of study to possibly approaches to actually dissect the Church's iconographic material. Moreover she does not engage critically with her source material to dig deeply over the origins of the images. So while seemingly insignificant and riddled with distracting anachronistic analysis (such as a baseless hypothesis of what the lotus flower would mean to a Christian in medieval China), the exploratory spirit of Yan's essay can help drive more creative analysis of the *Jingjiao* historiography. See: Xiaojing Yan. "The Confluence of East and West in the Art of the Church of the East" in *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang eds. (Wien: LIT, 2009), 383-392.

which to approach the identity of the Church of the East. Parry's work, in particular, provides a strong point of departure for implementing cultural naturalization.

Perhaps most significant of the iconographic approaches attempting to identify cultural confluence between the Church of the East and other religions, Kenneth Parry's work on analyzing the imagery of the Quanzhou tombstones has provided the pioneering analysis of *Jingjiao*'s interreligious iconography which is extremely useful when using iconography to try and explain religious identity. In one of his early articles on the Church of the East, Parry identifies the image of a cross atop a lotus and jewel (the only overt Christian image on the Xi'an stele) as a central image of *Jingjiao* iconography. He connects the image to Buddhist roots, indicating that the jewel represents the *cintamani*, an object invoked in the common Mahayana Buddhist chant *om mani padme om*.[41] The lotus also commonly serves as a parallel to the Buddha or the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, according to Parry.[42] This is an early qualification of the iconographic borrowing executed by the Church of the East. However, Parry does not elaborate further on this. Rather he chooses to examine another motif found in the *Jingjiao* iconography.

Displayed on quite a few Quanzhou gravestones, the images of two angelic figures flanking and upholding a crucifix grabs Parry's attention. These angelic beings (apsaras) remind him of the images of Byzantine winged victories that usually take a similar position with the Greek *chi rho* or a wreath and Parry attempts to make this connection in his work on the

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[41] Kenneth Parry. "The Art of the Church of the East" in *Jingjiao: the Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter ed. (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006), 323.
[42] Parry, 324.

Church's iconography.[43] In a more recent chapter piece, Parry takes up this investigation again, proffering further evidence in support of the migration of the presentation motif across Asia to China. Among them, he presents a Sasanian jewel with two angels upholding a crucifix and wall paintings from the Qizil and Dunhuang cave complexes, respectively.[44] This interesting connection back to a Byzantine motif diverges from all his other connections to iconographic assimilation of religious motifs found in China, although his tracing of this motif is inconclusive and awaits further evidence that either strengthens this claim or offers a better alternative. Aside from this unique connection, Parry continues to make connections between the Christian relief images on the Quanzhou gravestones and local Buddhist imagery. The reliefs on the pagodas at Kaiyuan temple in Quanzhou have just such a similarity according to Parry.[45] Through examination of angelic beings and other motifs, Parry's efforts have helped to lay the groundwork for deciphering the imagery of the Church of the East in China and supplement the work already completed by translating the extant manuscripts and epitaphs of the *Jingjiao* Christians.

In the definition of cultural naturalization as a concept, then, we can use Zürcher's views of the power of the Chinese cultural imperative as an overriding factor of foreign religious

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[43] Parry, 330-1.

[44] Kenneth Parry. "The Art of the Christian Remains at Quanzhou" in *Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Quanzhou (Zayton)* Samuel N.C. Lieu et al ed. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 251-255. There are in fact many instances of these motifs found throughout what is currently northwestern China and areas of Central Asia found on the People's Republic of China's northwestern borders.

[45] Parry "The Art of the Christian Remains at Quanzhou," 258 and 260. Parry's connection here is well-founded. Not only are the two iconographic styles of the pagodas and gravestones very similar, according to my observations, their sculptural styles are also quite similar, with many of the gravestones possessing consistent medium-depth reliefs, just the same as the reliefs at Kaiyuan Temple. Moreover, this relief-style can also be seen on the Muslim and Hindu carvings, which leads me to believe in the possibility that an equal portion of responsibility may lie with the artisans (a guess which is not so far-fetched due to Quanzhou's prominence as a stone-carving city, even to the present).

interaction to open up new paths of inquiry to how we interpret the process of hybridization of the *Jingjiao* manuscripts, epitaphs, and iconography. Taking the focus away from a premeditated conscious effort of the Church of the East's missionaries to syncretize or even to assimilate, Zürcher's model and naturalization forces us to reconsider the circumstances under which these Christians redefined their material culture in China and helps lay the foundations to propel us further into the social worlds that Quanzhou Christians inhabited.

Contact and Equilibrium: the Ideation of Cultural Naturalization

Naturalization in its current definitions possesses biological and political meanings. Biologically, an organism that has been introduced into a new environment and makes necessary adjustments to survive and thrive without negatively impacting the host ecosystem can be considered to have completed this process. Sometimes known as an alien species, the organism operates more or less normally. For example, the ring-necked pheasant's (*Phasianus colchicus*) seamless transition to North American ecosystems embodies successful naturalization of an alien organism to a new ecosystem.[46] However, in this essay I employ such an analogy only as a crude illustration to help relate naturalization's new scope as an analytic tool for group/cultural interactions as I have drawn inspiration from the biological conceptualization of the term. In the interest of framing naturalization for immigrant cultures (it should be noted that this exercise considers religion to be a cultural behavior) this essay focuses on the latter definition of naturalization to frame the term to suit a cultural application.

With these examples in mind, there is no reason that Zürcher's cultural imperative in treating the issue of *contact* between groups would not serve as the background for illuminating the Church of the East in China by way of its naturalization in a Chinese environment. Moreover,

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[46] Ring-necked pheasants' introduction to North America and their resilience as a non-invasive alien species is well-known among American and Canadian farmers and hunters. The animal's wide distribution outside of its native ecosystem spreading from China to the area surrounding the Black Sea attests to its success at naturalizing in different ecosystems. Habitats to which it is introduced and thrive include the temperate climates of continental Europe and the American eastern seaboard, the dry continental climate of the North American prairies, and the temperate rain forests of the American Pacific Northwest. In fact, while pheasants have lived in North America since the late eighteenth century, the most successful effort to introduce them began in Oregon in 1881. At present, apart from the Rocky Mountains, pheasants occupy nearly every ecosystem in the northern half of the United States. For further information on the history of pheasant introduction see: W.L. McAtee, *The Ring-Necked Pheasant and Its Management in North America* (Washington, D.C.: The American Wildlife Institute, 1945), 1-6 and Steve Madge and Phil McGowan, eds., *Pheasants, Partridges and Grouses: a Guide to the Pheasants, Partridges, Quails, Grouse, Guineafowl, Buttonquails and Sandgrouse of the World* (London: Christopher Helm, 2002), 108 and 323-5.

the basic principle it entails (that of a minority/foreign religion attempting to gain currency by making itself relatable to the dominant audience—that is, any group(s), religious or otherwise, outside of the migrant group's own membership) logically fits into the definition of cultural naturalization being constructed here. To wit, just as an organism's environs dictate how it ensures its survival, the cultural environment set out by the groups at play in Chinese society dictate the dominant vernaculars to which the incoming religions must relate themselves to ensure the survival and possibly proliferation of their religious identity.

Syncretism and other specialized terms of analyzing religious identity have already been

| Cultural Imperative | → | Accommodation
Acculturation
Sinification
Syncretism
Vernacularization |

Figure 1. Current analytical
relationship: cultural imperative to
specific modes of analysis

discussed as being inappropriate to categorize the phenomena scholars have observed in the material culture of the Church of the East. The cultural imperative allows for basic analysis yet encourages greater investigation. These two approaches often act in implicit cooperation (figure 1) proceeding from the broad (cultural imperative) to the specific (syncretism *et al*). Following this model, the Church of the East falls through the cracks in the current relationship of these analytical frameworks. While the group shows evidence of response to the cultural imperative, little else can be done using the common method outlined in figure 1. In order to serve *Jingjiao*'s evidentiary shortcomings and allow for greater nuance in how cultural interactions can be

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analyzed, we must introduce naturalization to act as an intermediary framework between the broad and the specific.

Beginning with the cultural imperative, one convenient aspect of Zürcher's theory is its aim at universal applicability in a historically Chinese setting. It is certainly believable that any foreign group, culture, or religion entering the Chinese cultural sphere *felt* pressure to conform in one way or another to the local environment. Whether and how each group responded to the pressure remains another set of questions entirely.

Very likely in cases of pre-modern cultural interactions in China no 'marginal' religion possessed the ability to utterly shirk the pull of the cultural imperative. However, this does not put it outside the realm of consideration or possibility. What the relationship of figure 1 does not
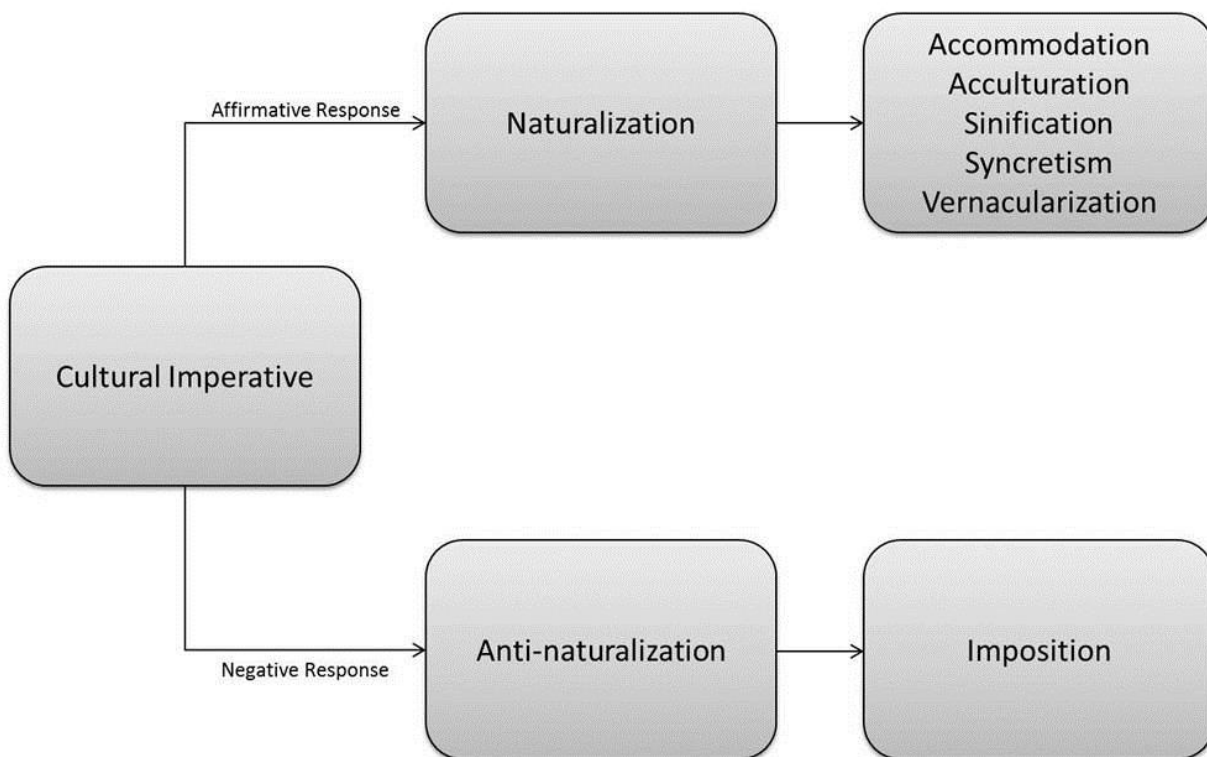

Figure 2. Complexification of former relationship
between contact and adaptation with the
inclusion of naturalization

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encompass is what happens when a group does not have an affirmative response to such an imperative and instead resists it, or more seriously, attempts to impose itself in rejection of the local environs. This possibility is not the main concern of the development of naturalization as a concept with which to examine the evidence of interactions in the Church of the East. Still, it is nonetheless important to discuss its possibility since naturalization may or may not occur to varying degrees as a response to the draw of the cultural imperative. Such a scenario of wholesale imposition would likely play out similarly to the results of imperialist missionary interaction in nineteenth century South Africa and the local Tswana people. Such an experience was often violent, coercive, and destructive for the host Tswana groups.[47] It is difficult to find a corresponding example of such coercive behavior of a marginal (that is, minority) religious group in China before the advent of mission societies following the Opium Wars—a similar time period as the subjugation of the Tswana.[48]

Naturalization's insertion into the model of figure 1 complicates it greatly (figure 2). It not only highlights the possibility for rejecting the cultural imperative and a refusal to naturalize, but it more importantly illustrates the affirmative response to the cultural imperative. Such a response sets off the progression to naturalization and then to a possibly more specific analytical framework. It is important, however, that naturalization be understood as an autonomous category in addition to serving as the bridge between the cultural imperative and the more

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[47] See: Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) for a lengthy discussion of the domination of Tswana culture by foreign religious groups.

[48] Even while in the same time period, different mission society policies varied between China and South Africa. Eitel himself, though, demanded an absolutely unflinching resolve for Christian missionaries in their relation of the Gospels. This reflects this same type of uncompromising imposition that I have related in the South African example (Eitel, 387). The point of unification remains, however, in that the encounters between these minority religious groups and the majority of the host groups in both places precipitated with the aid or threat of military force.

specific concepts. It is precisely its characteristic as an intermediary concept that makes this autonomy possible; the concept as it analyzes the process from contact to something more specific bears hallmarks of both sides of the progression. Naturalization is broad enough to imitate the near-universal effects of the cultural imperative, yet specific enough to lend similar analytical strength as syncretism, accommodation, *et cetera*. This is necessary in cases such as the one examined here with the Church of the East in China, where I argue that our current knowledge of the Church does not allow for us to move beyond a phase like naturalization at present. This is not something that necessarily needs to be corrected; a naturalizing group may never leave a state of naturalization depending on its relationship to its new environment. There may never be an opportunity to claim a more specific mode of analysis, but naturalization can already relate a great deal about the immersion of the migrant religion in its local surroundings as will be discussed in ensuing sections. The dominant point here is that by understanding how a group went about naturalizing (or not) will thus contribute to informing more specifically and with greater accuracy the types of adaptation (or not) the group eventually displayed.

Naturalization in this context also does not require a complete response to the affirmative process I have described in figure 2. In fact some resistance to the pull of the cultural imperative is necessary in order for the process to allow the incoming group to retain any sense of diversity while operating within and among the host group. Simply, there must be some areas beyond compromise that preserve the migrant group's identity that it imposes as non-negotiable on the hosts. Referring back to figure 2, there are two ways that a group might respond to the cultural imperative: affirmatively or negatively. There are varying degrees to which a group might undergo such naturalization. It might not happen at all. Nonetheless, assessing the extent to which a group shows evidence of naturalization (or not) must be assessed in order to begin

further, more specific analysis of the migrant group's interactions with the surrounding host groups.

Cultural naturalization, despite being used here for the very specific purpose of analyzing the Church of the East in China, possesses potential for broad application. In its focus on marking evidence of observable behavior—that is, evidence that cultural interaction and communication has already taken place—naturalization seeks to characterize the results of interaction and communication based on sources available for examination and look further into the social worlds that different actors inhabited. The analytical properties employed in naturalization make no mistake about their limits; they observe the basic information present in the extant evidence and framing analytical perspectives to account for the phenomenon of interreligious imagery found on Christian funerary artworks. From that basic information, then, bloom new questions about the Church of the East in China and its immersion in the social fabric of Quanzhou, along with the new characterization of identity that naturalization carries with it instead of syncretism. It attempts to answer these questions by looking at religious interaction as an equilibrious system involving sundry cultural actors. To this extent, one could logically apply the criteria for cultural naturalization to the Jesuit situation of the Qing period and even in non-Chinese contexts.

Before proceeding to my primary analysis, then, cultural naturalization relies on two interlocking points that can serve as criteria for its identifying a culture undergoing or having undergone naturalization. First, a naturalizing culture shows signs of balance between it and the cultural environments with which it interacts. Second, the naturalizing group, while exhibiting the above equilibrious relationship, continues to show signs of its own memes' integrity and, in the case of *Jingjiao*, dominance in advertising its identity. This primacy can include the mimicry

of other groups' behaviors or images that make it familiar, fluidly operating within dominant

cultural networks. These two criteria, while illustrating naturalization as the negotiation between

contact (the cultural imperative) and the results of adaptation in response to contact, will be

helpful in the following sections as the analysis proceeds to look for signs of identity and

naturalization in the tombstones of Quanzhou Christians.

Semu and *Yelikewen*: Naturalization and Yuan-era Christianity

Of the epigraphic and iconographic sources on Christianity available from the Yuan Dynasty, the vast majority consists of gravestones that come from the southeastern port city of Quanzhou. Looking at these stones, there are several areas where the *Jingjiao* religious communities explicitly display retention of Christian religious identity and a resistance to accept or (in the words of Berling) reconcile religious ideas that do not complement their Christian identity. We can also see ways in which the Christian community in Quanzhou displays mimicry of motifs from the surrounding environments. As an example of *Jingjiao*'s retention of identity, many stones possess eulogies using Syriac, the long-standing liturgical language of the Syriac Church of the East. Many stones also use the Macedonian dating system adopted after Alexander the Great's conquest of parts of central Asia.[49] In terms of iconography, the crucifix nearly always features on the funerary carvings. Much of the imagery adapted to the Christian stones may be found in what are often recognized to be Buddhist contexts, such as apsaras and the lotus flower, and exhibit signs of adaptation to reflect Christian subject matter. All of these aspects reflect preservation of *Jingjiao* identity and a focus on projecting familiarity with surrounding communities and should thus give pause when trying to find a legitimate assessment of religious identity barring future discovery of evidence to support such claims. Instead, we should first examine how Quanzhou Christians' artifacts show evidence that they may have naturalized their outward expression in a positive response to the cultural imperative they were feeling.

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[49] Here, in labelling the calendar thusly, I follow the lead of an Australian team's research and explanation of the calendar in Lieu, et al (2012), 162. The Macedonian, Seleucid, or Alexandrine calendar begins its dating in 311 BCE and its dates are sometimes abbreviated with the initials AG for A*nno Graecorum*.

Before continuing to analyze the tombstones' iconography and texts, it is first important to note how this essay will make reference to specific tombstones where necessary. To do this, the paper will draw on a catalogue constructed by Chinese academic Wu Wenliang and the updated second edition by his son, Wu Youxiong, and a catalogue developed using the Wu pair's work by an Australian team of researchers.[50] Both Wu Youxiong and the Australian research team's catalogues employ the same alpha-numeric system from Wu's catalogue. Christian tombstones are signified first with a "B" and then the corresponding number of the tombstone as each appears in the catalogues. Since many tombstones lack any indication of their owners' identities, I adopt this system of identification as the tombstones may be readily identified in either of the two catalogues employing this system.

Syriac-alphabet eulogies can be found on the majority of tombstones bearing any epigraphy from Quanzhou. This gives clear indication of the preservation, if not prevalence, of *Jingjiao*'s traditional liturgical language and script in the Quanzhou community. Of the many tombstones excavated from Quanzhou that bear inscriptions, eleven have Syro-Turkic[51] inscriptions written using the Syriac alphabet. Two of those also have Chinese-language inscriptions that provide a small supplement to the Syro-Turkic content. Aside from bilingual stones, exclusively Syro-Turkic gravestones outnumber all stones with Chinese, Phagspa (a *scripta franca* of the Yuan—used to transcribe Chinese and Mongolian phonetically), Uighur, and Mongolian combined. The next largest group is the Chinese with four mono-lingual stones.

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[50] Youxiong Wu, *Quanzhou zongjiao shike* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2005) and Samuel Lieu, et al. Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Quanzhou (Zayton) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

[51] This is a label to describe the inscriptions from Quanzhou predominantly using East Turkic language groups for their eulogies. According to the Australian research team, the label attempts to avoid anachronisms while attempting to be as accurate as possible. However, they admit that it is ultimately an artificial term of "convenience" and not a term self-ascribed by any historical source. See: Lieu et al, 166.

Following that, a Chinese-Phagsba bilingual group is the next largest with three more stones. The high linguistic diversity of these stones strongly indicates a lack of sinicization of non-Chinese[52] speaking Christians during the Yuan and a preservation of a functional and recognizable language for those eulogizing the deceased.

With these linguistic characteristics in mind, the nature of Syro-Turkic eulogies on Quanzhou tombstones requires further investigating. Apart from retaining the Syriac liturgical language to express their language, many of the tombstones utilize the Macedonian calendar previously introduced. Of the stones using Syro-Turkic, B17, B19, B20, B21, B22, B28, and B50 all invoke the Macedonian reckoning.[53] Notably, the lengthy bilingual tombstone of Mar[54] Šilimen (B37) does not use this reckoning but instead only employs the Chinese calendar. This is important to mention because B17, B19, B20, B21, and B50 all utilize both Chinese and Macedonian calendars. Additionally, B21's text makes clear its authors' understanding of the Chinese and Turkic calendars' congruence.[55] It needs to be abundantly clear that the connection to the Chinese (and sometimes Turkic) calendars comes from the Syro-Turkic voice on the tombstones. This, while inappropriate to use when looking for evidence of syncretism because it lacks indication of intentionality that such an assessment requires, nonetheless lends itself to showing how the non-Chinese, predominantly Turkic speaking religious group operated fluidly

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[52] Marc Abramson refers to what we commonly perceive as 'Chinese' to fall under the category of "Sinitic", a concept I wish to reflect when using 'Chinese' as a label for the languages of the majority of inhabitants of the former Northern and Southern Song empires. In relation to the languages used on the *Jingjiao* tombstones, this also should reflect written Sinitic language as well.

[53] Lieu, et al, 179-211.

[54] Often considered best translated as 'bishop' (Tang, 2001; Lieu, et al, 2012). Regardless, the important information conferred by the title is that the figure should be considered one of religious authority.

[55] Lieu, et al, 200-201.

within the dominant cultural setting in which it resided, a key ingredient for a group exhibiting naturalization.

Aside from using the Macedonian

Figure 3. B 50 . Apsara with cross/lotus and cross crown accompanied by Syro-Turkic eulogy, c. 1313 CE. Quanzhou Museum

calendar, many of the Syro-Turkic tombstones begin with a preamble using Syriac text and language before continuing on in Syro-Turkic with Syriac letters.[56] This preamble always invokes the name of the Christian Trinity of God, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[57] The retention of Syriac as a liturgical tool as well as the continued observance of the Macedonian calendar indicate a clear, solely Christian identity—yet another characteristic of naturalization.

Imported languages and dating do not mark the only indications of a distinct Christian identity preserved and operating within the Chinese-dominated cultural scene of Quanzhou. The tombstones' iconography offers sundry examples of not only a borrowing of iconography commonly found in Buddhist contexts to express Christian ideas, but even the possibility that the

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[56] B17, B20, B21, B22, and B50
[57] Lieu, et al, 183-4.

adopted images may have been modified to suit Christian teachings and that the general feature

of many of these tombstones is the primacy of the cross as representative of the religious sect.

The most recognizable symbol of the Syriac Church of the East in China in both the

Tang[58] and Yuan dynasties is clearly the motif of a cross paired with a lotus (hereafter known as

the cross/lotus motif). The image is present on the well-known "Stele Commemorating the

Dissemination of the Luminous Teaching of *Da Qin* to the Central Realm" housed in the Xi'an

Stele Forest Museum and very well-represented on the vast majority of Christian tombstones

excavated in Quanzhou. The cross/lotus image parallels the Buddhist imagery of a jewel and

lotus pairing, a very common motif stretching back to at least the 4th century CE in cave

networks of the Hexi corridor now in present-day Gansu province and in Qizil as well.[59] The

jewel specifically refers to the Buddhist *cintamani* (*monibaozhu*/末尼宝珠 and *ruyibaozhu*/如意

宝珠 in Chinese), though this is already well-known and documented as referenced above in the

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[58] Currently, there is much debate on the possibility of iconographic continuity between the Tang and Yuan due to the overlap of images from both periods to include many of those discussed below in this analysis. Given the consistent overlap of many motifs to be discussed that somehow survived across several centuries, the notion that these motifs (and with them a community) survived in one form or another during the *interregnum*. Unfortunately, there is no clear evidence to corroborate any of these hunches. Moreover, the cross/lotus motif to be discussed is particularly interesting as after the advent of Christianity during the Tang, it remained the singular image found throughout the dominion of the Yuan to include: present-day Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan, Inner Mongolia, and Fujian. However, there is no clear evidence for its usage as a symbol of the Church of the East prior to 781 CE and the erection of the Xi'an *Jingjiao* stele. These coincidences are no doubt intensely intriguing but unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper at present.

[59] The jewel-lotus motif can most notably be found extensively throughout the Mogao cave network in Dunhuang. Cave 249 from the Northern Wei (386-535 CE) is the oldest cave to display the jewel-lotus motif and quite possibly is one of the oldest anywhere. Caves 292 and 296 from the Northern Zhou (557-581), caves 324, 390, and 427 from the Sui (581-618), cave 205 from the Tang (618-907), and 367 from the Song (960-1279) period all depict the jewel-lotus motif. It is worth mentioning that these are just a few examples of the motif as the caves listed here represent a fraction of the hundreds of caves in the complex.

analysis of Parry's work.[60] Parry's analysis stops with identifying the *cintamani*, however, and he does not proceed to highlight the jewel's association with the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha. As referenced above in the section dealing with Parry's work, the phrase "*om mani padme om*" connects directly to the *Lotus Sutra* and Avalokitesvara as the bodhisattva that both the mantra and sutra invoke respectively. Ksitigarbha bodhisattva is likewise responsible for rescuing souls from hell.[61] Depictions of both figures often contain a *cintamani* as a tool with which they use in their mandated endeavors as bodhisattvas meant to ease believers' suffering.

The *cintamani*'s association with these two figures and its common manifestation in the jewel/lotus motif presents too many coincidences to avoid conjecture on its

Figure 4. Apsaras and jewel/lotus, Tang Dynasty. Dunhuang, Gansu, Mogao Cave Complex Cave 205

meaning. First, Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of mercy and compassion, and Ksitigarbha, the retriever of damned souls, both embody capacities that very closely parallel Christ's messianic role. From there the leap (though a leap nonetheless without evidence of these Christians'

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[60] Parry, 323 and William Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms: with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 191.
[61] Soothill, 208.

intentionality) is very short to the cross/lotus motif. The crucifix, the Christian symbol of Christ's salvation, replaces the *cintamani*, the symbol reflecting the same concept. Again, while this is admittedly conjecture and a real answer to this puzzle may never come to light without more evidence, the parallels between the *cintamani* and crucifix's meanings and the parallel structure of each set of imagery are too strong to ignore. At the very least, due to its prolific presence in the Mogao caves of Dunhuang, it cannot be denied that the *cintamani* has been an easily recognizable symbol in Buddhist iconography for several centuries prior to the Tang immigration of *Jingjiao*. It hints at *Jingjiao*'s modification of local prominent iconography to convey its own salvific ideas and, at the very least, to present a recognizable imagery to the outside world.

Also prominent in *Jingjiao* iconography on the Quanzhou tombstones, apsaras occupy space on many of the excavated stones. Again, the parallel here with Christianity is obvious as Ken Parry points out in both of his analyses of the Quanzhou tombstones' iconography.[62] Regardless of whether or not the images originated in Byzantium (as Parry suggests), angelic imagery existed in Buddhism well before *Jingjiao*'s first recorded mission to China.[63] Additionally, the added complexity to the question of their religious origin matters little as overlapping images only further allow a religious group to fluidly display its own iconography in a familiar fashion. In addition to the apparent interreligious parallels, the apsara images of the Quanzhou tombstones appear modified from their traditional role. Just like the *cintamani*, apsaras can be found in many caves of the Mogao complex in Gansu. Apsaras at Dunhuang that

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[62] Parry "The Art of the Church of the East", 330 and Parry "The Art of the Christian Remains at Quanzhou", 251-55.

[63] Cave 292 dated to the Northern Zhou displays apsaras in close parallel with those found in Tang and Yuan Christian iconography. However, Parry's examples also predate Christian missions to China. Either method of transmission (or both simultaneously) lack the concreteness necessary to make such an assertion unassailable.

feature in the company of the Buddha are frequently descending to meet him or descending to hail his teachings.[64]

Looking at these two motifs (the cross/lotus and apsaras) as they manifest on the tombstones can give additional hints about the retention of Christian subject matter as the primary sign for a Christian observer. By looking at many of the stones possessing these images and how their images are composed, we as viewers can uncover the possible ways in

Figure 5. B6. Multi-tier arched tombstone with clouds, cross, and lotus, c. 13th-14th cent. Quanzhou Maritime Museum

which the stones reveal the primacy of these Christian signs, through the intricate compositions of various images.

While this exercise predominantly examines areas of Christian imagery, many of the images complementing the cross on the tombstones in the Quanzhou museum can be found elsewhere, particularly on Muslim tombstones from the same time and period. Often, on the Muslim tombstones, the floral and cloud motifs support a moon-like disc or Arabic calligraphy.[65] Additionally, as previously mentioned, the apsara imagery found on the Christian tombstones of Quanzhou can be seen on the east pagoda of the well-known Kaiyuan temple near the heart of

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[64] Caves 249, 324, 329, 331, 367, and 390 all depict apsaras descending to hail the Buddha. Interestingly, Cave 3 and 204 notably deviate from this, instead depicting apsaras hovering in the company of the Buddha.

[65] See Wu, 79-84, 101-102, 113-114, 116-117, 151-152, 156-160 for prominent examples of these; Wu also provides a direct comparison between what Muslim and Christian tombstones may have looked like respectively on page 225.

the city. Lastly, as I indicated above, the cross/lotus motif very closely parallels (and in the Christian context, replaces) the jewel/lotus commonly found in Buddhist iconography.

These strong stylistic and structural parallels in Muslim funerary artifacts and other examples found throughout Quanzhou raise several interesting question about the gaze of potential viewers. How would someone who is unfamiliar with the significance of a Christian image view and interpret a cross on these stones? Would they pay it any mind? My answer to these questions would argue that a viewer ignorant to Christian signifiers could still recognize the images as significant. Namely, the *Jingjiao* tombstones pair the cross with complementary images (clouds, lotus, and apsaras) that, due to their strong presence in other iconographic settings, would likely be familiar to outside observers to Christian groups and therefore quite possibly understood to be significant. Therefore, these possibilities for primacy in the Christian eye and a similar understanding of new images as significant ones for an outside eye lend strong support for the naturalizing process of fluidity while retaining integrity of group identity.

There are at least eleven tombstones, physically extant or otherwise recorded,[66] that have a similar shape and composition of their respective images. The tombstones in this first group are listed as numbers B1, B2, B3, B4, B6 (pictured), B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, and B12 in the Wus' catalogue as well as in the catalogue by Lieu *et al*. This group of tombstones all has a common tiered arch shape that reflects its original position as the headstone of an altar-style tomb that also has the aforementioned parallel iterations with Muslim sarcophagi and tombstones in the

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[66] The issue of each stone's materiality is an issue worthy of a future project. While many stones remain intact, a comparable number have been lost in the decade of upheaval during the Cultural Revolution or lost prior to Wu Wenliang's pioneering effort to preserve as many religious tombstones as he could. As such, many tombstones exist either as copies, photographs, or rubbings. Despite this unfortunate situation, such alternatives to the physical tombstones nonetheless remain useful for the exercises performed in this study.

Quanzhou area.[67] Each of them has a similar structure in common with the others. Each has the image of the cross. Many have the full cross/lotus motif for which the *Jingjiao* iconography is well-known. The headstones also all have a series of either clouds or flowers at the base of the stone. Each iteration of these images then has the tell-tale cross (in one form or another) positioned atop this base of clouds or flowers.

Taking a tombstone like B6 (pictured) from the Quanzhou Maritime Museum, a viewer can quite easily see how the images present on the headstone coordinate. The way that the clouds (in the case of B6) curl upward to support the base of the cross/lotus has a simultaneous effect of guiding a viewer's eye from the base of the headstone images to focus on the topmost figure: the cross. Looking at these headstones with a focus on how the images can direct the attention of the viewer privileges the undisputedly Christian subject matter as the primary sign of the tombstone. How these images were *meant* to be viewed is an entirely different question altogether and is possibly fated to be permanently unknown. However, the fact that the cross (and not even the cross/lotus) remains the sole consistent motif on all of the tombstones in this group gives strong indications that the stones in fact reflect primacy of Christian subject matter while incorporating images and structures familiar to observers from outside the Christian community.

Related to the first group of images, but slightly more complex, the tombstones that possess pairs of apsaras with a cross/lotus motif (B7, B19, B23, B31 (pictured), B32, B34, B35,

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[67] Ruji Niu, *Shizi lianhua: Zhongguo Yuandai xuliyawen Jingjiao beiming wenxian yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 235-6. Additionally, Muslim tombstones of this and other styles far outnumber the extant Christian ones. Many are currently housed in the Quanzhou Islamic Culture Exhibition Hall located on the same grounds as the Quanzhou Maritime Museum.

B41, B50, B53, and B54)* can also be interpreted as focusing the viewer's attention toward the cross as each stone segment's primary image. In this group, the apsaras as angelic beings feature consistently. Most of the images have one on either side of the cross or cross/lotus—each facing inward from their own respective positions.

Again, using B31 as an example, we as viewers can interpret the cross as the directional focus of each respective image. The apsaras—like in the iconography coming from Dunhuang where they may also be found—serve as complements to the image they surround: the cross in this case, and the Buddha or jewel/lotus motif at the Dunhuang cave complex. Each angelic figure's attention appears fixed on the cross sitting on the pedestal that the two beings support. Tombstone B31 (pictured) exemplifies this trend as these beings' fixation draws the viewer's gaze to rest on the central image of the cross. Like the previous group, it is impossible to access the *intended* focus of the image. However, from this interpretation of its construction, the Christian focus remains clear when considering how the images' compositions can direct a viewer's gaze.

Figure 6. B31, Apsaras with cross /lotus, c. 13th-14th cent.
Quanzhou Maritime Museum

The subtle constructions of images in these two groups reflect the concepts of naturalization discussed earlier in this paper. Such an interpretation of the way these two groups' images are composed reflect the primacy of Christian identity while maintaining several images that parallel iconography and tombstones found in the area like the images found at Kaiyuansi and Muslim tombstones found throughout Quanzhou. Primacy of Christian subjects reflects a different trend of adaptation than syncretism (at least as employed to previously discuss the Church of the East in China) and other categories of analysis can potentially encompass with the evidence available.

Finally, the last exercise in drawing iconographic parallels between imagery found in Buddhism and Christian depiction on the Quanzhou tombstones comes from the canopy motif. A long-standing and easily recognizable image in Buddhist iconography, the canopy (or umbrella) motif symbolizes the presence of the Buddha. Its use stretches back to the very roots of Buddhist imagery prior to the introduction of anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha but continued through its overlap with Christian migration into China.[68] In Quanzhou Christian iconography something interesting occurs. Much like the cross/lotus motif (also used in these examples), the canopy covers the crucifix as it would the Buddha. Five Quanzhou tombstones display the cross and canopy pairing. [69] However, despite the prominent Buddhist background of the canopy image, the crucifix remains the focus. The canopy merely acts as a complement and can hardly be considered a reconciliation having been denuded of its primary figure for which it serves as a complement. The Buddha is nowhere to be found, and the image that traditionally

[68] The image figures in the hybridized Indo-Classical Gandhāran sculptural style from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, for example. See: Lolita Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style: a Study of Contributory Influences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[69] They are B13, B14, B23, B38 and B39 in Lieu et al., 2012 and Wu, 2005.

heralds his presence is now employed in a Christian setting. Like the stones that possess both Macedonian and Chinese dating systems, these stones also display an adoption of familiar, local imagery to depict the immigrant religion's basic theology. The prominence of the cross acts as the key. It highlights the focus on Christianity: such a strong and unmistakable Christian symbol dominates the complementary images around it, further indicating the strength of Christian identity evident on the tombstones.

The iconographic evidence indicating preservation of religious identity for Christians of the Church of the East clearly points to the proclivity for Christian subject matter to stand out on these tombstones and thus illuminates the naturalizing process for this religious group. However, this source-material does little to explain why this preservation may have taken place. It only reveals that these images exist in congruence with the others. A simple answer can be found in the political standing of the majority of Christians of the Church of the East in China during the Yuan. As part of the second-highest class (*deng*/等) distinguished among the empire's population as *semu* (色目), or "all kinds of people", many Christians of the Church of the East— usually those with Central Asian backgrounds—enjoyed a politically privileged position as provided by Yuan governmental institutions and statutes.[70] Such political privilege would give little incentive to easily abandon components of their own identity.

While evidence of this privilege is sparse even in sources dedicated to the time period, there nonetheless exist concrete references to governmental distinction between *semu* as the class to which most Christians in the Yuan period belonged, and the two classes below *semu* in the Yuan social strata consisting of occupants of the former Northern and Southern Song dynasties,

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[70] Frederick Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 490 & 492.

respectively.[71] These distinctions can be found in the collection of Mongol imperial administrative law, the *Yuan dianzhang* (元典章) wherein a discussion on how to distinguish non-Mongolian subjects of the empire attempted to clarify the different groups in order to banish different groups to different military posts. This discussion, which distinguished between *semu*, Northern Han (*han'er*/漢兒), Korean (*gaoli*/高麗), and Southern Han (*manzi*/滿子), considered anyone not part of the non-*semu* categories to be included as *semu*.[72]

Because of their *semu* status, residents of the empire that were neither Mongolian nor fit into either Han category enjoyed explicit favoritism when being selected for administrative positions. Volume 83 of the *Yuanshi* describes the process of filling official posts by appointment. Including having established a tiered system for hereditary applicants, the entry also describes the process whereby *semu* received an extra rank above the applicants coming out of the two categories of Han subjects.[73] These political distinctions exhibit imperial favor of the *semu* class over other non-Mongolian subject groups. As the majority of *Jingjiao*'s linguistic evidence attests to their belonging to the *semu*, many of the Christians living in Quanzhou and throughout the empire would enjoy the political privileges of such a position, offering little incentive to do anything to compromise this position.

Often referred to as *yelikewen* (也里可溫) in Yuan sources and in some of the Quanzhou tombstones, Christians of the Church of the East also were religiously distinct from the other

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[71] Mote, 489.

[72] Jiaben Shen, *Da Yuan shengzheng guochao dianzhang* vol. 49 *Xing bu* 11 "*Qiang qie dao*" (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1964), 10b-11a. I have chosen to interpret *manzi*/滿子 as Southern Han to reflect the distinction between the Northern and Southern Song dynasties as this is the distinction between the classes made by the statute. Since the inhabitants of the Southern Song were conquered last, they were given the lowest place on the scale of Yuan political privilege (See: Mote, 489). This avoids the potential pejorative use of the original Chinese term, though it may come at the cost of the original intent for the Yuan imperial usage.

[73] Lian Song. *Yuan shi*, Jialuo Yang, comp. (Taipei: Dingwen shuji, 1981), vol. 34, 2060.

sects among whom they lived in the empire. The term *yelikewen*[74] is often taken to denote the Mongolian term for Christian groups under Mongolian rule. However, some suggest that the term could be more than just a religious distinction but another class as well.[75] For the purpose of this examination, the religious denotation will suffice just as well.

Yelikewen as a religious group appear in different evidentiary forms to attest to the existence of a distinction between Christian groups and other religious sects in the empire, giving little room for claims of assimilation or attempts at syncretism. First among these is a curious case of a complaint lodged by a Daoist supervisor that Christians in the Wenzhou circuit of Zhejiang province[76] are unfairly registering Daoists as *yelikewen* and even coming into conflict with the Daoists when the time comes to present offerings for the sake of the emperor. The complaint posits that the Christians feel themselves above the Daoists and are trying to supersede them by presenting offerings after the Buddhists but ahead of the Daoists in the order or presentation.[77] This is an interesting case for a variety of reasons. However the primary point of interest here is that the complaint makes clear distinctions between the Buddhists, Christians, and Daoists, revealing that such distinctions were not only commonly recognized by Christians *and* other groups but that the complainant, in framing the complaint with such boundaries, likely anticipated legal support by invoking them. This speaks volumes against the degeneration that Saeki claimed to have observed in the Tang-era *Jingjiao* sources he studied and the later labels of

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[74] The term *yelikewen* is currently widely considered to be a transliteration of the Mongolian *erkegün/ärkägün*, though the actual etymology of the Mongolian still remains a matter of some speculation. For example, the term could derive from Uighur, Greek, or Arabic. See Tang (2011), 54-57 for a discussion on this terminological issue.

[75] Taishan Xu and Xiaoping Duan, *Yuandai Yelikewen kaoshu* (Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2012), 26-31.

[76] The text actually gives the name for the agglomerated region of Zhejiang and Jiangsu (*jiangzhe*/江浙).

[77] Shen, *Da Yuan shengzheng guochao dianzhang* vol. 33 "*Yelikewen jiao*" (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1964),14a-14b.

syncretism attached to the sect based on his and Eitel's respective analyses. It also undergirds claims of preservation of Christian identity on the tombstones of Quanzhou, giving the iconographic interpretations highlighted earlier greater weight in its assertions of Christian identity persevering in the company of other religious groups.

Aside from the iconographic interpretations to be made with the Quanzhou tombstones, several of the artifacts reveal some interesting information about *yelikewen* as a distinct religious group as well. Two Quanzhou tombstones, one memorializing a Mar Šilimen and the other erected by another Mar Anduonisi both refer to the expired man (Šilimen) and the dedicator (Anduonisi) as the local religious administrator (*guanling*/管领) for the Quanzhou area, respectively.[78] In fact, Šilimen is listed as the administrator for both the Manichaeans (*mingjiao*/明教) and the Christians (*qinjiao*/秦教) and as a *yelikewen* himself.[79] Anduonisi is listed as a *yelikewen* and as administrator for the *yelikewen* in the Quanzhou circuit.

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[78] B37 for Šilimen, and B51 for Anduonisi. Both men have Anglicized names as well: Solomon and Antonius. However, I have chosen to retain names more closely related to those rendered in current pronunciations of their inscriptions: Šilimen/失里門 and Anduonisi/安哆呢ᵓ思.

[79] The use of *qinjiao*/秦教 to denote a Christian group in the Yuan is extremely interesting and has striking parallels with the Xi'an *Jingjiao* stele composed in 781 CE. The term most certainly indicates Christians when taken in conjunction with the mirroring Syro-Turkic inscription and there has been much speculation on the reasons for using this term over *yelikewen* in the Chinese version of the inscription. One possibility could be to avoid the double usage of *yelikewen* so close together. The question remains, however, as to *how* the local people knew of the term when it is so far not present in other sources from the Yuan. Wu Youxiong, 396 and Lieu, et al, 206-208.

Figure 7. B37 (left), eulogy for Mar Šilimen c. 1313 and B51 (top), eulogy dedicated by Mar Anduonisi c.1306. Quanzhou Maritime Museum

It is interesting to consider a couple of things about these two men. First, they are both listed as being in charge of overseeing Christian activity in Quanzhou, and, second, they are both identified as *yelikewen*. This implies that there were enough Christians in Quanzhou and the surrounding areas to appoint someone to manage their affairs during at least the first quarter of the dynasty.[80] With Christian presence being strong enough in the empire to warrant their official oversight—and conferral of privilege—naturalization becomes a much more attractive category of analysis corroborates such claims of integrity of identity with few reasons for assimilative or syncretic behavior.

In light of the dominant Christian content of the tombstones' iconography, the aspects that might be linked to Buddhism—such as the ones covered briefly above—are secondary to preeminent Christian subject matter and fail to display any inclination toward reconciliation. The texts that accompany these images only ever correspond to a Christian identity and the complementary images do not typically retain a strong enough connection to their parallel religious imagery to derail the dominant Christian message. Thus, returning to Berling's broad

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[80] B37 is dated to 1306 and B51 is dated to 1313, respectively.

definition of syncretism and its focus on reconciliation—in this case between Buddhist and Christian subject matter—her emphasis on reconciliation fails to concretely materialize in the example of *Jingjiao.* Moreover, in light of their privileged political position there was no need for the majority of Christians in Quanzhou and the empire in general to syncretize, Sinify, accommodate, *et cetera*, and in light of the material and textual evidence here, it is unlikely that they were coerced to do so. We can only really concretely connect the evidence on the Christian tombstones to Christian subject matter and Christian ideas through the eulogies present on the stones and the political evidence found in various written sources. This points us as viewers in the direction of seeing a distinctly—naturalized—Christian identity intermixed with images from the surrounding area.

The *Jingjiao* evidence base lacks the substance to employ a similar method to corroborate that Buddhism or Islam actively played a role in the life of the Quanzhou Christian communities. We can only safely claim that, because the evidence favors the retention of Christian religious sentiments, the stones—as speakers for the Quanzhou Christian community—instead convey an inclination toward a superficial adoption of other motifs as the religion naturalized to the surrounding cultural landscape. The same goes for some of the guesses just ventured. We can draw connections and parallels through the evidence that supports assertions of naturalization (and beyond), but without further primary sources they lack concrete affirmation. However, the lack of evidence of intentionality does not spell the end for studying the Church of the East's identity in China. It is one of the aspects that make study of this unique group so seductive. These parallels and connections exist in *Jingjiao*'s epigraphy and iconography and their primacy is supported in Yuan texts. That cannot be denied. The symbols mimicked from the surrounding environment also cannot be denied. Naturalization, the immersion of an alien culture into an

existing cultural environment and the process by which, through the cultural imperative, it

becomes familiar to the local people while remaining distinct, thus steps in where syncretism and

other constructed categories might fall short.

Conclusion: Glimpsing Yuan Society through the Evidence of the Church of the East

Ernst Johann Eitel's claims about the Church of the East in China, while never mentioning syncretism, linked with the reputation of James Legge's work and sparked the characterization of *Jingjiao* as syncretic that persists even to the present. Problematic because of the lack of evidence to support such claims, syncretism and (separately) the basis for these opinions need to be reassessed. Restructuring how we examine and deploy analytic categories when viewing interacting cultural groups is the answer to this problem that is highlighted with the case of the Church of the East in China. Introducing naturalization is the way to effect such change: employing it as a concept makes us as viewers slow down and account for the ever-shifting landscape that serves as the background for this subject.

Considering the evidence presented above in the analysis of the Quanzhou tombstones, Christian groups, in migrating into China and adopting certain text and images of the surrounding environs does not necessarily result in a change in religious identity (or species) that the term syncretism suggests. The evidence shows, however, modified display of Christian memes that effectively harmonize such modes of expression into complementarity with surrounding traditions. That is, the stones display mimicry of common local symbols to convey Christian subject matter. Such a phenomenon, while not necessarily compromising the incoming group's religious identity, makes its messages more familiar to the communities among whom they live and worship. Therefore, just like organisms can naturalize to a new environment and operate with integrity of identity, religious groups migrating into new cultural landscapes can do the same.

The shortage of sources providing information about the Church of the East and the clumsy manner by which it has been—and continues to be—employed lead exactly to syncretism's specific misapplication as the traditional lens through which to view the religious identity of the Church of the East. As indicated earlier, because syncretism attempts to dissect the apparent coalescence of two or more religious traditions, it requires access to source material that indicates a clear direction of such transmission. Since the only sources present in the *Jingjiao* corpus show the products of religious interactions and testify against loss of identity, claims of syncretism currently are not well suited to this study of religious identity, especially as they have been utilized in twentieth century studies of *Jingjiao*. Such arguments preclude all other possible results stemming from cultural interactions and neglect to inquire what alternative circumstances may have affected the agglomeration of the various texts and images. Cultural naturalization counters the negative influence of syncretism misplaced—where it exists—in the specific context of the Church of the East because it follows Zürcher's theory of contact through the cultural imperative to offer an explanation for the mixing of so many disparate images in a Christian setting.

In this way, I present naturalization as a tool for how to dig into different group interactions. In this spirit I have followed the path laid out by Nicolas Standaert in *Methodology in View of Contact between Cultures: The China Case in the 17th Century*. Standaert's work and this one share the common characteristic of devising formulae for how to analyze the evidence of interaction. It is in this same interest that I have offered the idea of cultural naturalization to provide a similar effect from a different approach.

Naturalization's revision of the former method (figure 1) for analyzing religious interactions draws on the benefits of the broad applicability of the cultural imperative. In

expanding the older model and allowing for a greater diversity of views of interactions between cultural groups, naturalization allows scholars to substantively analyze the Church of the East within the dominant framework of interaction between cultures. Given enough evidence, naturalization also allows greater freedom to interpret the evidence as its availability allows precisely because it prevents a hasty assumption of a more specific category like syncretism.

Using naturalization as a means to question how religious interactions worked, we can work to unpack the interactions to which these Christians' tombstones give testimony. In this endeavor it expands on Zürcher's cultural imperative to display alternate approaches to how we view religious interactions in China. While naturalization does not claim to complete the arsenal needed to study all religious interactions in Chinese history, its focus on emphasizing the fluidity of religious advertisement for migrant religions as well as the preservation of their home identity makes it an important contribution to the study of religious interactions in China and elsewhere as well.

The introduction and application of cultural naturalization enables current viewers to examine the Church of the East in a way that situates the religious group into this ever-shifting cultural environment. From its application in the evidence available, the Christians of the Church of the East retained their religious integrity and appear to have engaged in much more sophisticated levels of interaction than have previously been entertained. By using naturalization as a means to explain religious interactions between Christians and other resident cultures of Quanzhou, we can get further into the social worlds of Quanzhou that these individuals inhabited and speak to the lived experience of these Christians in that old port city.

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